What Should You Know About Teaching On The Navajo Indian Reservation?

AN ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

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PREFACE

There is a tremendous demand for information regarding Dine culture, lifestyle, and learning styles. This revised orientation handbook entitled What Should You Know About Teaching On The Navajo Indian Reservation? is designed to help new teachers begin to know and understand, in a small way, the People with whom they will be working and living amongst for a period of time.

Mr. Richard Lester, a former teacher on the Navajo Reservation, initially compiled, edited, and prepared the original handbook. He speaks and writes from his personal experiences. Though the original handbook was released in 1985, the information is still very relevant today. Minor updated changes have been made. Writings and artwork by students are included in the original form.

It is our sincere desire that this handbook will make your entrance into our world a little easier.

This handbook was reviewed and changes made by staff of the Department of Instructional Support Services under the supervision of Mr. Eddie Biakeddy. Special thanks go to Margaret Watson who typed, proofread and finalized the text. It was also reproduced under the auspices of the Department of Instructional Support Services within the Navajo Nation Division of Education, Window Rock, Arizona 86515.

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For the text of his speech "Cultural Awareness," a special thanks to Carl Gorman, noted Navajo lecturer who contributed so beautifully to the discussion on the "Dineh" (Navajo People, Chapter 2).

The traditional Navajo recipes found in Chapter 3 were provided by the Navajo Parks & Recreation Department in Window Rock, Arizona.

Chapter 3 was also enhanced by contributions from two Navajo high school students from Tohatchi, New Mexico. Pearl Bitsie authored the piece entitled "Yei-Bei-Chai Dance" while Mary Hood wrote "Squaw Dance".

Chapter 5 also contains student material by Desiree Tsinnie ("What A Teacher Should Know Before Coming Here") and Johnny Payaso ("Navajoland"). My thanks also to a number of my high school and 8th grade students in Tohatchi who were absolutely effusive in their information, suggestions, and support. Much of their material which simply couldn't fit in this publication was sent to Missouri for publication in a major pow-wow newsletter.

Chapter 5 could not have been written without the input of many of my high school and mid-school colleagues who took valuable time to write up their opinions and experiences. Thanks also go to John Turner of Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona for many valuable ideas, all of which have been incorporated in the text.

Chapter 6 is the result of many notes and dittos which list neither an author nor a source. However, they form part of Indiana University Orientation Package for student teachers in the Native American Program. A special word of thanks to Karl Herr who started his reservation teaching career in the IU program. He generously made all the orientation materials available to me and many of the journal articles in his file have provided me with additional insights and information.

Chapter 7 owes a debt of gratitude to Kathryn Polacca of New Mexico. Her teaching strategies may be found in an article entitled "Ways of Working with the Navajos Who Have Not Learned the White Man's Ways." (Journal of American Indian Education, November, 1962).

Illustrations were expertly handled by Navajo students Mike Tahe, Irving Bahe, and Eugene Armijo.

Much of the typing credit goes to Theresa Velasquez. Senior editor for the project was one of the most conscientious ladies in the academic publishing field today--Vivian V. Lopez. Muchisimas Gracias!

Last, but not least, my gratitude is extended to The Navajo Tribe, whose support through the Navajo Johnson O'Malley Program made this project possible.

CHAPTER I

So You Might Be Coming To Navajoland?

So you think you might be interested in working on an Indian reservation in America's sunny Southwest? You even think perhaps Navajoland might be just right for you?

That same idea occurred to me back in 1973, when I was teaching in a rural poverty area of Virginia and beginning to look for new challenges.

While I have enjoyed a number of years of teaching on the reservation, I have also found many friends and colleagues packing their bags - determined to leave Navajoland once and for all. They displayed various emotions, ranging from frustration to despair. Their bitterness and anger could be seen in both words and deeds. Their careers were ending on notes of emptiness and failure. Even though they faced an uncertain future elsewhere, they were all firmly committed to one immediate goal - leaving the reservation as soon as possible.

What went wrong in the lives and careers of these people? Why did they experience such utter failure? After all, we each came to Navajoland with similar hopes and aspirations, as well as a sense of dedication which teachers seem to universally share.

After observing the flow of reservation educators over time, it has become obvious that many well-intentioned people came with romantic ideas of what life among the Navajos would be like.

Hit with severe culture shock upon arrival, many simply could not cope or adjust. The realities of life were just too different from the dreams.

To help bridge the gap between dream and reality, material found in this booklet is designed to help the prospective newcomer. It represents the collective wisdom of reservation students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Navajo educators and leaders have also provided some thoughtful insights into their own people and culture.

Your life and career on the Navajo Reservation can be filled with excitement, fulfillment, and accomplishment. Such rewards are yours to claim if you prepare carefully and your attitude is open and right. Only then will the adventure ahead be successful.

With you in mind, this collection of reflections and comment has been prepared.

CHAPTER II

What Should You Know About The Navajo People?

A few facts about Indians in general will help to give you some perspective concerning Navajo people in particular.

The 1980 Census reports over one million people designated as Indians. (Since Navajo authorities disagree sharply with federal census figures, it is not clear how many of these are Navajo. A rough estimate would be 200,000, give or take 30,000).

To be designated as an Indian eligible for government services, the Bureau of Indian Affairs says basically an individual must live on or near a reservation, be a member of a tribe recognized by the federal government, and be of one-fourth or more Indian descent.

The BIA counts 266 Indian tribes, lands, villages, pueblos and groups (excluding Native Alaskans). The Navajo Tribe is by far the largest one. New Mexico is also the home of the largest Indian Pueblo - Zuni.

There are about 250 Indian languages. Navajo is one of the 250, and it is used extensively throughout Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

While Navajo people find it disagreeable to be compared in any way with their Apache and other Athabaskan cousins, their languages are quite similar with rate of speed at which words are spoken being one of the few major differences. (Apaches speak faster).

Dine is the name they use to identify themselves. Other Athabaskan groups also belong to the family of Dine.

Navajos are not "wards" of the Federal Government. The government is a trustee of Indian property, not a guardian of individual Navajos.

Must Navajo people stay on reservations? No. They are first class American citizens with full rights as citizens. They can move about as freely as you and I. On June 2, 1924, Congress extended American citizenship to all Indians born in the territorial limits of the United States. They vote in national, state, and local elections as well as in tribal elections where eligibility is determined by tribal law.

Navajo people may run for and hold federal, state, and local elective office. In New Mexico, Arizona and Utah, there are Navajo school board members, as well as Navajo county commissioners, and state legislators.

Indians in general, have held some of the highest elected offices in the land. Herbert Hoover's vice-president was Charles Curtis, a Kaw Indian. Ben Reifel, a Sioux Indian from South Dakota served five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and Ben Nighthorse Campbell is a respected member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Navajos can also own land. Indian lands are owned by both tribes and individual Indians. While this land is held in trust by the federal government, an individual Indian may sell his land if the Secretary of the Interior determines that it is in the individual's best long-range interest to do so.

Navajos are subject to local, state, and federal taxes while off the reservation, but on the reservation they enjoy substantial tax exemptions which apply to their land and any income from the land. Salaries are subject to U.S. Federal Tax.

While 86 tribes now allow alcoholic beverages on their reservations, the Navajos still enforce a total ban on alcohol. Consequently, they must travel to such border towns as Gallup, Farmington, and Flagstaff if they choose to buy and legally consume alcoholic beverages. Because distance prohibits accessibility of liquor this results in bootlegging by some individuals.

It is true that Dine have many characteristics in common with other Indians. It is also true that they are unique in many ways. Perhaps the most important factor setting them apart from all other people is their culture. In the words of Navajo Carl Gorman:

> As Indians, we can consider ourselves members of a dark-skinned, black haired, brown-eyed race. But we are not the only people who are dark-hued than the white race. Some are so dark they are called black. Our genes and our appearance alone are not what make us Indian. There is something more basic. I realized I do not think like a white man. Many things in my behavior are not like a white man--Indian people have never sought to conquer Nature. Nature is no respecter of man's law. We seek to live harmoniously with the forces of Nature and have a deep respect and reverence for all life.

Gorman also notes that in Navajoland, some of the most traditional lifeways are still being lived:

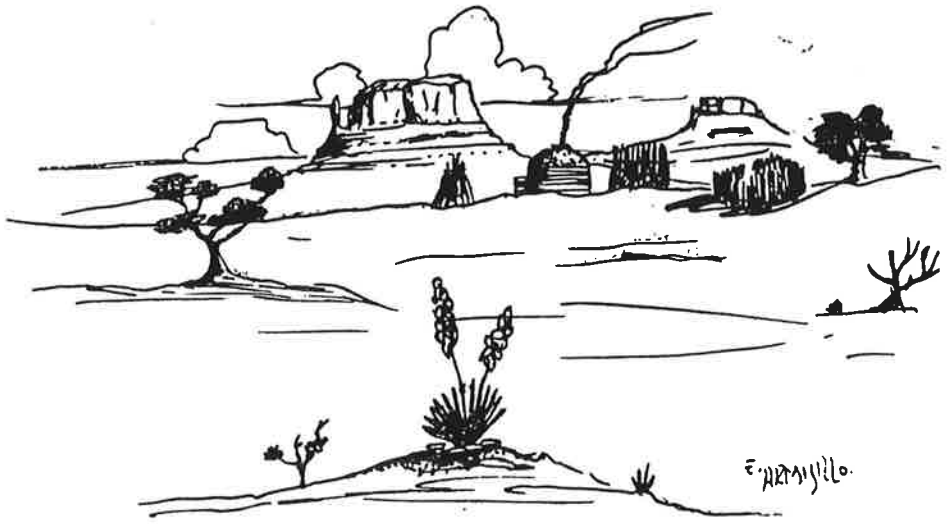
> We still have Navajos who speak little or no English. They live in hogans, herd sheep, attend ceremonies. Our women wear dresses that have been traditional for over a hundred years. Some men and many women still tie their hair in the traditional knot or Si-Yelth, a style that goes back hundreds of years.

We still go to the medicine or herb man for herbs, or go to a hand-trembler, listener, a star or crystal gazer to diagnose illness, find a lost or stolen article or to reveal sorcery or a sorcerer.

(from the text of a speech
Entitled "Cultural Awareness" by Carl N. Gorman).

Two activities which are quite popular among the Navajos, aside from traditional ceremonies and dances, are rodeo and silversmithing. While rodeo is a popular weekend entertainment from spring to fall, silversmithing is a year-round occupation which has provided many a family income. Navajos learned the art of working with silver and turquoise during their period of internment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico (1864-68). Today, as the many Indian jewelry shops on the streets of Gallup will attest, Navajo jewelry is big business.

Navajo taste in clothing runs to jeans, cowboy boots, and expensive Stetsons for the men and similar casual attire for the younger women. Older women dress in traditional styles adapted from those of the white women of the 1860's. For 120 years, Navajo women have been reluctant to change the "traditional style." Another style is the "biil" or blanket dress which was adapted from the Pueblo. It is a woven garment worn with buckskin leggings. These are usually reserved for very special occasion.



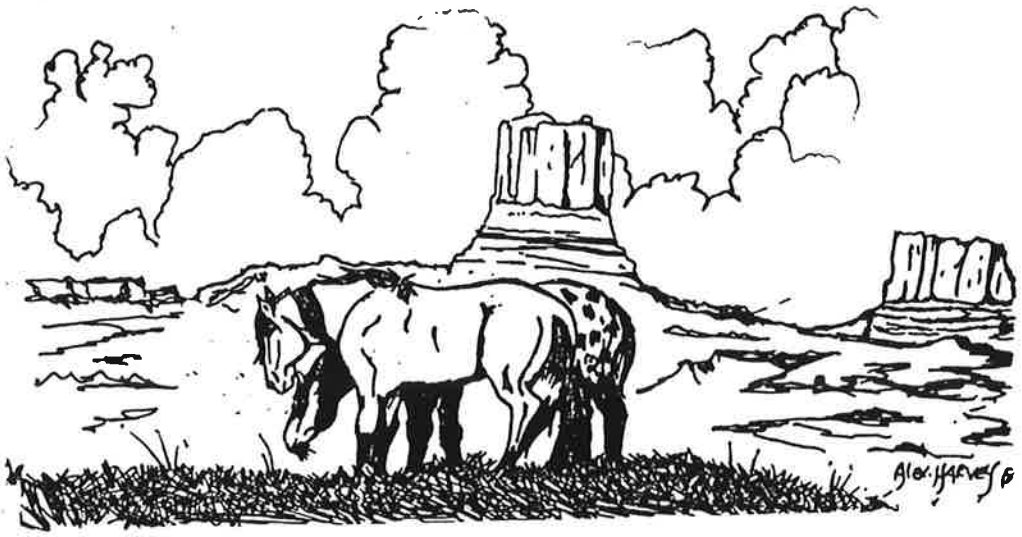
Navajo transportation invariably takes the form of a pickup truck. Gone is the traditional Navajo horse and wagon. Fading also is the horse as a common form of transportation. More and more Navajo teens are taking to the roads on motorbikes.

Many rural Navajos still live in the traditional hogan. Hogans are built of logs or stone. They have six or eight sides and always face East for religious reasons. A fire pit for heating and cooking is in the center. In the old days it was an open fire. Today, a wood stove is usually the centerpiece of the room.

In some isolated rural communities, the infrastructure is not developed resulting in no paved roads, no electricity or running water. Families haul water many miles for everyday use, therefore conservation is a key ingredient in water usage. Showers and baths are luxuries not easily affordable.

Because there is no electricity, schoolwork may be affected because it is difficult to read and write by lantern. The problem is magnified by demands to tend to chores as well as long bus rides which may take as long as an hour or more each way. The inexperienced teacher may regard incomplete homework assignments as insubordination. Those teachers who have been around a while know better. They know that a little creativity will help the students in surmounting these difficulties.

Culture, tradition, and history are the backbone of a people. To more fully know and understand the Navajo, today's reservation educator must immerse himself in all three areas. As Carl Gorman notes, "It is not enough to pass on the racial genes----it is necessary to affirm one's culture."



CHAPTER III

What Should You Know About The Navajo Culture?

Any discussion about traditional Navajo ways runs the danger of distorting a picture of what the Navajo people are really like.

While we think of silversmithing and blanket-weaving as traditional sources of income for Navajos, a 1960 survey indicates that only 1.4% of Navajo income was generated through arts and crafts. A whopping 30% of regular income was earned working for the BIA, States or Navajo Tribe. For 22 years the shift has continued to be away from home industry on into the office building.

While it is far more nostalgic to think of traditionally dressed Navajo families crafting silver by hand, the reality is that of a modernly dressed young Navajo xeroxing and typing in a government office building. Our romantic notions are no longer statistically viable.

So please keep in mind that insights into Navajo tradition may sensitize you more to the needs and goals of this particular minority group, but you should not conclude that all (or even a majority) of your Navajo students live in the traditional way anymore. Quite the contrary. Many young Navajos today find themselves in the untenable position of feeling alienated from traditional beliefs, yet unable to fully embrace the predominant Anglo culture. Many of today's youngsters find themselves trapped between the two worlds. In exasperation, some turn to drugs and alcohol in an effort to escape from this identity crisis which is both real and widespread. For many of the youth, Navajo tradition is but a part of a cultural heritage rather than a way of life. For others, when the seriousness of life is at stake they come to realize that Dine tradition and culture provides a stability and strength of mind, spirit and physical being not easily come by in the western culture.

Food

In a discussion about Navajo food, we can clearly see the blend of Anglo and Indian tastes. Every 8th grade class I ever taught rated hamburgers, fries, pizza, and fried chicken as their number one choice of food. There are always a few votes for tacos, chile, and burritos, but hamburgers never lose a vote - ever!

In traditional areas, mutton stew, well cooked mutton and beef, fry bread, fried potatoes, and coffee are staples.

Universally on the reservation, young people consume prodigious amounts of soda pop. A number of teenagers and adults also consume alcoholic beverages, with beer being by far the number one drink. Alcoholism is a major problem on the reservation.

To give you an idea of what a few of the traditional food favorites are like, the Navajo Department of Parks and Recreation has provided the following three recipes:

Mutton Stew (Atoo')

Take a leg of mutton or any part of the meat. Cut the meat into small pieces and place in boiling water. Potatoes and onions, also cut into pieces, are added and the whole is boiled until the stew is done. Carrots and celery, also cut up, may be added if desired. Salt is usually added later.

Blood Sausage (Dil)

Prepare the sheep's large intestines or colon for blood sausage by cleaning thoroughly. When a sheep is slaughtered the blood is caught in a pan, and while fresh, is mixed with corn meal until mushy. Diced potatoes are put into this, and bits of fat are added, with a little salt. Some cooks add chile to the mixture.

The intestines are stuffed with the mixture, tied or securely closed then boiled thoroughly over medium heat. Occasionally, when boiled too rapidly, the sausages burst open.

Fry Bread (Dah diniilghaazh)

Because of frequent requests for this recipe, it has been reduced to measurements. Navajo cooks use handfuls and pinches, instead of cupfuls and spoonfuls.

Mix together 2 cups of flour, 1 teaspoonful of baking powder, a pinch of salt, and 1/2 cup powdered milk.

Add warm water while mixing dough. Knead until dough is soft but not sticky. Cover with a cloth and allow to stand for about 2 hours. Shape into balls about 2 inches across. Then flatten by patting with the hands until a circle about 8 inches in diameter is formed or roll out with a rolling pin.

Have about half an inch of lard or commercial shortening heated in a heavy frying pan. Test the temperature of the grease by dropping in a pinch of dough, and if it browns quickly but does not burn, the grease is hot enough.

Some women make a small hole in the center of the round before frying. The dough is fried golden on one side, then turned and cooked to the same color on the other. The thinner the dough circles, the crisper the fry bread.

One last thought. To be a hit with your Navajo kids, you will not have to eat sheep's head or blood sausage. Hamburgers and pizzas will do just fine!

Dine Ceremonials and Healing Rituals

To the Navajo, achieving and maintaining harmony within the community are important social goals. Since health is associated with harmony, illness indicates a disturbed harmony in nature and requires community cooperation in the performance of healing ceremonies. Communal healing rituals take the form of sand paintings, steam baths, curing chants and prayers. These chants and prayers form the core of the belief system. It is important to remember that while most major religions are concerned with the hereafter, the Navajo religion is concerned with living long and well in this world.

Aside from protection prayers, ceremonies may last from one to nine days and nights.

Sources of illness include non-observation of taboos or witchcraft. The illness may manifest itself physically, pschologically, emotionally or mentally and the ceremonies are designed to heal wholistically.

While most ceremonies are for curing purposes, the Blessing or Beauty Way is for restoring harmony and balance in a person's psycho-social and spiritual being.

There are also a few ceremonial rituals for hunting, war, trading, and gathering salt.

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The following essays were prepared by Navajo students especially for this booklet. They wanted to share some of their ceremonials with you in their own words.

Yei-Bei-Chai Dance

by Pearl Bitsie

A Yei-bei-chai dance is a nine day ceremony. It starts whenever the people that the ceremony is for have everything ready for the ceremony. The first few days they have prayers and they keep singing until about the fifth day.

They also tell people to help. Then the people that are willing to help bring food, sheep, or whatever they can give to the person who the ceremony is for. Then until the fifth day some men disguised as Yei-bei-chais go around to people's houses for food. Then after they get enough food or money they take it back to the hogan where they have a prayer for the food that they brought back.

After the prayer, they have a feast. Only the medicineman, the people who the ceremony is for, and the men disguised as Yei-bei-chais get to eat the food that was brought back. Then on the seventh day they sing and dance all night long. On the last day of the ceremony the people who the ceremony is for have to sit in front of the men disguised as Yei-bei-chais while they are dancing. They dance all night long.

When they finish one dance, the people who the ceremony is for hold a basket full of corn meal so that when they start another dance they have to put it on the dancers to start another dance. They just dance all night long and that ends the ceremony. Usually the ceremony is to cure the ill and is only done during the winter. People who are diagnosed to have ear and eye problems and bad headaches are usually the patients.

Navajo Enemy Way, "Squaw Dance"
by Mary Hood

The Navajo Enemy Way ceremony is a four day ceremony. It usually is on a weekend, when everyone is not so busy. It is held for someone who is sick or an invalid. It is supposed to make them well. On the first day (usually Thursday) the people who are relatives or friends collect yarn and make a Prayer Staff or "wand" to signify to the Holy Ones when an enemy-way ceremony is being conducted. A red felt cloth, an eagle feather, and evergreen boughs are used in preparing the prayer staff.

Then on Friday evening the people all gather and fix the yarn. They put the yarn on people who want to ride horses and put some on the other transportation. Finally they all ride to the receiving party's residence. When they arrive at the hogan, the medicineman sings some chants and the people from across run and take all the yarn off the riders and vehicles. Then the people from the squaw dance side usually gather and form a big circle, and the people from across bring food and the people who came from the squaw dance eat.

That night, usually called a "First Night", the people at the circle dance and sing all night. When morning comes and the sun's up, the people from the squaw dance form a half circle before the hogan and sing. The people across come and throw things out to the people who've gathered. The things thrown out are mostly snack food and materials. Gifts of substance or value are also given to the main players in The Enemy Way Ceremony. Finally when this is over, the people go home and rest for the next night (usually on Saturday night called the "Second Night"). There they just form a circle again from the people across and they eat and sing and dance. Second nights are always fun. This is the big night for socializing. It is when people wear their best clothes, visit, sing or dance the night away.

CHAPTER IV

What Should You Know About The Navajo Reservation?

The largest Indian Reservation is the Navajo land with sixteen million acres stretching across the three states of Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. Additions to the reservation since 1868 have increased it five times its original size.

Most of Navajoland is over a mile high. Because of the high altitude, the air is thin and the nights are cool year round. Winters are often severe, with deep snows and sub-zero temperatures. In the summers, temperatures are moderate and rainfall is light. Overall color of the landscape is brown (as opposed to the greenery found in the East).

It is interesting to note that the only place in the United States where four states share a common border is on the Navajo Reservation (Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico). Also the post office farthest from the railroad in the United States is in Navajoland (Kayenta, Arizona).

The Navajo Reservation boasts a few towns such as Window Rock, Kayenta, Fort Defiance, Tuba City, Shiprock and Navajo, New Mexico. However, most of the reservation is rural. The landscape is dotted with occasional isolated hogans and small communities featuring mission churches, schools, trading posts, chapter house, and perhaps a post office.

Many hogans are difficult to see because they are built in unsuspected places and blend into the landscape. The Navajo Tribe has begun to develop some of its vast natural resources (virgin timber, coal, gas, crude oil of such high grade that it doesn't need refining, helium, copper, and uranium). However, there is constant soul-searching when deciding between developing resources which will produce a higher standard of living for the tribe, while at the same time not wanting to disturb the environment.

Window Rock, Arizona is the capital of the Navajo Nation. It is named for "the Rock with the Hole in it." Window Rock consists of a couple of small shopping centers, fast-food restaurants, a motel operated by the tribe, gas stations, and the BIA and Navajo Tribe office buildings. The Navajo Tribal Council Chambers are also located within sight of the window rock. Navajos wanted their main council building at Window Rock while BIA was trying to build at Fort Defiance.

Window Rock was chosen capital of the Navajo Nation in the 1930's primarily because Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, thought the area was really beautiful.

The Tribal government has an elected President with a Vice-President and a council of 88 members elected every four years and headed by a Speaker of the Council.

Above, Window Rock, in New Mexico is one of the reservation's newest towns - Navajo, New Mexico where a tribally owned enterprise has built the largest sawmill in the United States. Representing a 7.3 million dollar investment in 1959 and today employing 400 people, the Navajo Forest Products Industries is responsible for scores of new homes in the area and the products are marketed to wholesalers around the country.

The oldest tribal enterprise is the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority headquartered at Fort Defiance, Arizona. Its assets total over 120 million and it permanently employs 465 people. Navajos also own and operate the reservation telephone company (Navajo Communications Company).

Today's reservation problems include alcoholism, lack of quality education, inadequate transportation, and chronic unemployment. As the tribe wrestles with these major difficulties, it must decide whether to accept or reject strip mines, gasification plants, factories and new towns. This economic potential means a higher standard of living for the Navajo people, yet it also means a change from the traditional Navajo beliefs and way of life. Modernization or Traditionalism? The choice is not an easy one for today's Navajo.

It is the belief of many Navajos that being a contemporary Navajo does not necessarily mean to become like a white person, but rather that one can be Dine who uses western knowledge and schooling successfully yet still retains and practices the ancient Dine knowledge, language and culture.

CHAPTER V

What Should You Know About Education On The Reservation?

I asked a class of juniors and seniors in Navajoland to write up a few things they felt you should know about Navajo students. Desiree Tsinnie and Johnny Payaso have some ideas I feel are worth sharing with you.

What A Teacher Should Know Before Coming Here.

by Desiree Tsinnie

First of all, a teacher should know about the climate. The weather is mostly unpredictable. During the summer it gets so hot. It hardly snows here in Navajoland during the winter. It seems that spring doesn't last long.

Then there's the students. Most of them (or us) try real hard to learn. Some don't like school and just come to warm the desks. Very few don't even come to school. The majority of the students attend classes every day. As far as I'm concerned it's the girls that try the hardest. I'm not saying the boys are dumb. I'm saying that 98 percent of the school are fast learners and try hard to learn what they can, while the other 2 percent cause trouble for everyone.

The population of this area is quite low, so there isn't as much noise as most places. It's not as messy and trashy as most large cities I've seen. Air and water pollution are about the only things we don't have here on the reservation.

The people here are nice. Not as talkative as I am, but nice. No one hates you unless they've got a good reason to. I don't understand some people though. Some of the friends I have are weird, but most are nice and friendly.

This place isn't what you might call paradise either. Tumbleweed and dirt are all you see around here. Tohatchi High isn't as colorful as you think. Neither is anywhere else.

Navajoland

When people come to the Navajoland or reservation to teach Navajo students, they want to know what the Navajos are like and what they do. The land here on the Navajo reservation is dry and mostly flat. Here on the reservation the wind is blowing and the weather is very cold in the winter and warm during the summer time.

The Navajo people eat delicious meals of roasted mutton, mutton stew, wild potatoes, corn meal mixed with sheep's blood and bread which is made from freshly ground corn. Some Navajo people live in a house with only one room and in this one room there maybe eight or more people.

Some Navajo students have low achievement levels. A student in the tenth grade may be reading at the seventh grade level. Navajo students who don't care for school are attending school because the law says they must. While these students attend school, they may ditch classes or walk into their classes late. Most Navajo students who are disruptive will give teachers a hard time and while they do that they make the teachers feel out of place. Navajo students who make good grades or get on the honor roll are very few because the Navajo people have a lot of home work, like herding the sheep, chopping wood for the fires that heat up their homes, and other chores that their parents give them.

Navajo students like to make jokes or put other students down. A student who makes good grades may be put down by another student who doesn't make good grades.

SURVIVAL INSIGHTS

As a new teacher on the reservation, you will most probably be housed in an apartment or trailer provided by your school district. You will live in a compound known as a teacherage with your fellow teachers. The most obvious advantage is that you never feel that you can get completely away from school or the people you work with.

So that you can anticipate some of life's little irritations in such an environment, I have asked a random sample of teacherage tenants to list for you their complaints about living on the reservation.

Teacher Complaints About Reservation Life

1. Lacks cultural aspects such as plays and concerts.
2. Barren landscape.
3. Isolation-physical, educational, social.
4. Isolation from one's peers; lack of social life.
5. Dust and Dirt!

The teachers overwhelmingly cited isolation as the major problem they faced in their life on the reservation. To help you cope with the problem, they offer the following tips which are working for them:

1. Be self-sufficient - at school and at home.

2. Have outside interests which will allow you to escape from the narrow confines of life on an Indian Reservation.
3. Develop interests which can be followed in rural settings.
4. Become involved with the students in extra-curricular activities.
5. Get involved in church or community activities immediately.
6. Don't look for or expect the same type of social life you find in the cities.
7. Slow down - the people here have different priorities.
8. Be casual, but neat. Be patient. Be sincere.
9. Do not come with the white man's burden of saving the Indian people. They do not want your pity or sympathy. They will enjoy a solid friendship with you based on mutual interests, however.
10. Be yourself. Do not try to be like a Navajo.

A Few Words On Sickness and Health . . . . . .

Yes, it's true. The health problems found on the Navajo Reservation are enormous. The incidence of TB, rheumatic fever, and hepatitus is high when compared with the general American population. In fact, gastroenteritis and dysentery occur 27 times more often among Navajos than among other Americans. Small wonder one of the teacher complaints about reservation life was the dust and dirt--which is constantly present in spite of the best house-cleaning habits. What she didn't mention is the occasional brownish color of the water which eventually you must drink and bathe in.

Obviously the reservation is not a place for the weak in spirit or body. The Bureau of Indian Affairs points out that the high incidence of infectious and communicable disease here is due to crowded housing, unsafe water, lack of nutritious food, and lack of basic health knowledge.

You might want to pack an extra bottle of vitamins and an ample supply of aspirin when you read the BIA's catalogue of health woes found among the Navajo. They include upper respiratory infections, influenza, pneumonia, dysentery, gastroenteritis, and streptococcal infections. Trachoma, virtually unknown to the general population, still occasionally plagues the Navajos.

A few other random health problems include otitus media (middle ear infection), eye, and knee problems. No one has ever been able to explain why Indians in general have weaker eyesight and why many Navajos have weak knees.

If you're beginning to think a health career might be more appropriate for you while working on the reservation, stop! There is some good health news to wrap this discussion up.

Navajos have their own effective cures for certain social diseases. Insanity is so rare among Navajos that medical authorities say it doesn't exist. No full-blooded Navajo stutters. No case of scarlet fever has ever been reported.

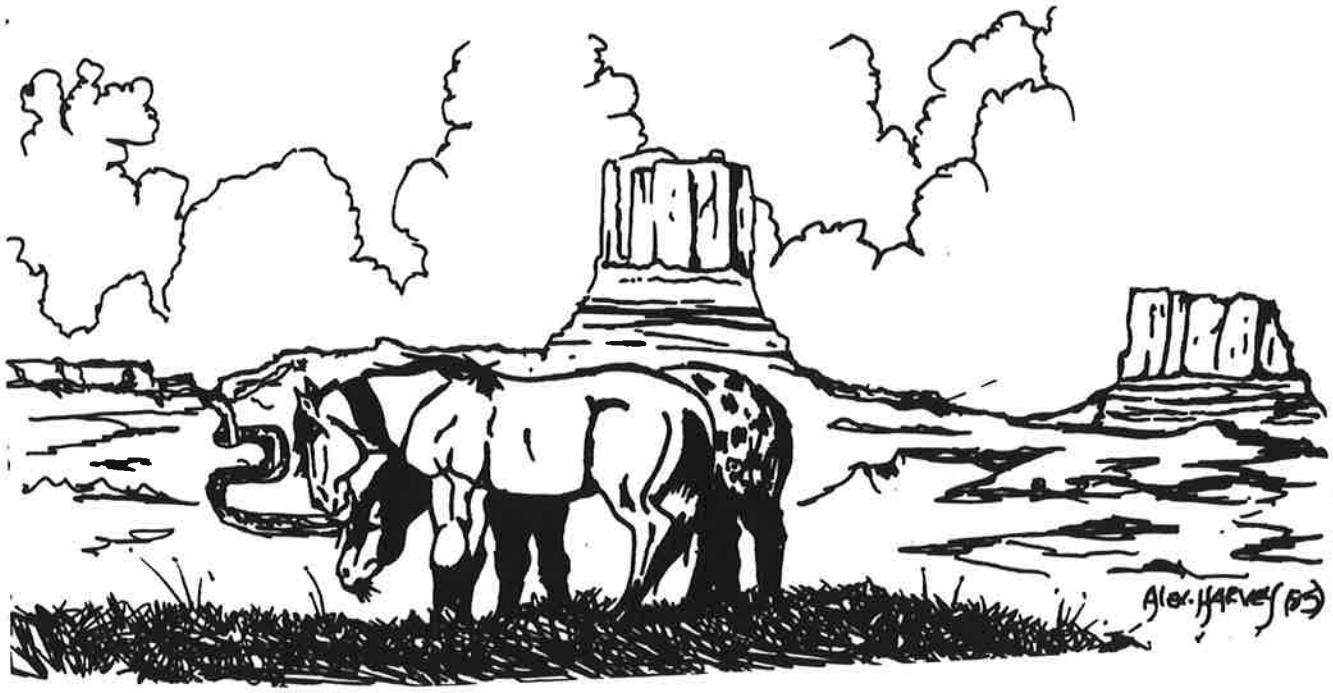
Finally, Navajos seldom die from snake bites. If a rattlesnake enters a hogan, the occupants shoo it away gently, talking in soothing tones, knowing no harm will come to the person if the snake is shown some consideration. Harmony.

I also asked a number of reservation teachers what you should know about Navajo students. Their comments are most enlightening.

1. Don't expect the students to be open to questions your first year. They will play word games with you as they check out your sincerity.
2. The Navajo people in general are a varied group. Some of them know their culture and some don't. Navajo students today are aware of many aspects of modern life through television or motion pictures. However, they can turn off the set and go to a squaw dance and enjoy both worlds. The students generally accept Anglo teachers and you need not feel you have to do an in-depth study of their culture.
3. Don't expect the students to show emotions or freely give their own opinions - They don't! (I disagree a bit here. I think that with time, your sensitivity develops a keen edge and you can read the emotions of your students just like a book. This particular advice is good for your first year or two, however).
4. Be prepared to offer <u>constant</u> reinforcement (I heartily agree. Also, look for ways to offer recognition for students and their work).
5. Be able to deal with the cruelty to animals that one sometimes sees on the reservations.
6. Have high expectations, but start the student at whatever level they are capable of. They often have weak academic backgrounds.
7. Navajos are less competitive than Anglos. Classroom competition can produce discomfort. Navajos are more cooperative in nature, and what might be considered cheating back East is just a neighborly sharing of work and answers in Navajoland.
8. Navajo children tease a lot. This teasing should not be taken seriously or personally. In fact, a good sense of humor on your part will win them over sooner than most anything else. Get a good joke book.
9. There is a definite language/communication problem; reading and writing skills are below average for most students.

10. In general, it takes awhile until you are accepted by many students. There seems to be a testing period that varies according to your personality. Be patient and genuine. Keep an open mind toward the differences that you may observe in students on the reservation; be sensitive to the things that may be related to or derived from traditional cultural beliefs.

When Paul Jones was Navajo Tribal Chairman, he greeted a new Navajo Agency Superintendent with these words: "We Navajos will look you over for a couple years, and then we'll decide whether we are for you or against you." And so it is with teachers too. One by one, as each appears, each must be studied before acceptance is offered. Harmony.



CHAPTER VI

What Should You Know In The Way Of Common Sense?

To avoid a classic case of western "hoof in mouth" disease, please strike the following phrases from your repertoire. We have heard them all spoken at one time or another here on the reservation and they have all contributed to a negative Navajo attitude toward the unfeeling outsider.

1. "Funny you don't look like an Indian."
2. "How."
3. "Just like a bunch of wild Indians."
4. "Columbus discovered America."
5. "George Washington is the Father of our Country."
6. "Indians don't have a sense of humor, do they?"
7. "Why don't you stop being lazy and develop this land? There's a lot of potential here."
8. "The first Americans were Pilgrims."
9. "Your jewelry is nice, but it's too expensive."
10. "Say something in Indian."
11. "Gee, a real live Indian. I've never seen a real Indian before."
12. "Tell me a little bit about the Navajo religion."
13. "Do Indians have religion."
14. "We really dig you Indians. You're our brothers."

Once the boo-boos are exorcised from your future conversations, you might benefit from a short list of Indian cultural values along with comparable Anglo values. It helps to know what factors will make not only your conversations meaningful, but, also your entire range of inter-personal relationships.

VALUES

The Anglo American believes in:	The Native American believes in:
1. Competition	1. Cooperation
2. Technology	2. Wisdom accumulated through experience and age
3. Manipulation of environment	3. Protection of environment
4. Accumulation	4. Sharing
5. Delayed gratification (the future)	5. Gratification now (the present)
6. Modernism	6. Respect for tradition
7. Youth as "the golden age"	7. Old age as the age of reverence
8. Science	8. Observation
9. Industrialization	9. Preservation of the status quo

10. Punishment	10. Restitution
11. Confrontation	11. Mediation
12. Striving for increased individual status	12. Status for the group or clan (it is inappropriate to work for individual status. Those who achieve it are often ridiculed).
13. Individual achievement	13. Happy human relationship
14. Meaningful relationships	14. Intense and highly personal relationships.
15. Wealth or position as a source of status	15. Character as a source of status

(from Indian University, Native American Program Orientation Materials).

Now that you have an idea of what <u>not</u> to say, as well as a general overview of Navajo philosophy, you may ask, "What then do Navajos talk about in their conversations?"

A Navajo conversation centers around certain things when the dialogue is with you, and sometimes different topics when both speakers are Navajo. Note:

<u>Conversational Content</u>

<u>Navajo with Navajo</u>	<u>Navajo with Anglo</u>
1. Navajo politics	1. Indians
2. Coming social and cultural events	2. Weather
3. Other Indians	3. School or Work
4. Past social and cultural events	4. Mutual acquaintance
5. White people and their racial attitudes	5. Sports
6. School or Work	6. News, politics, current events
7. Mutual friends	7. Activities of interest to Anglos
8. Romantic and personal activities	8. Rarely is there conversation about social events, unless they are work-related.
9. Gossip	
10. Job opportunities	

11. Family
12. Being Indian today

(Indiana University, Native American Program Orientation Materials)

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is to be natural, be geniune, and be honest in your conversations. Show some caring and concern, but don't be effusive. Be friendly, but not overbearing or aggressive in pursuing a friendship. Stand back and let the relationship ripen with time. Be prepared for a period of testing, during which you, your words, your actions and reactions will all be carefully evaluated. You cannot be deemed a worthy friend of the Navajo prior to passing this "pre-test."

Don't forget too, that many times you will find yourself in the middle of a conversation conducted completely in Navajo. When you are in a classroom with students, your initial instincts tell you they are talking about you. Hogwash! They are talking in the language they use at home --- one which they find more comfortable to use than English. Your students are neither ridiculing you, nor purposely excluding you from the conversation. Take it as a compliment that they feel secure enough with you to lapse into the language they use at home with family and friends. You've really arrived when your students no longer feel compelled to speak English every moment they are around you.

"What is it," you may ask, "that they are speaking?"

Navajos speak a language so complete that it has borrowed little from any other language. Believe it or not, Navajos have their own names for over 200 parts of the automobile and even for the vehicle itself.

The language is quite difficult for an Anglo to learn and almost impossible to pronounce because of its many explodent sounds, breath checks, and final breathings.

The Navajo language has no curse words. In fact, the most insulting thing a Navajo can do is call someone a coyote. I know of no teacher who has ever been subjected to that ultimate insult!

CHAPTER VII

May You Know Enough To Walk In Beauty!

Nothing I have said so far will make you an expert on the Navajo. Expertise comes not only from knowledge, but also experience. Only your personal success or failure on the reservation will tell you whether, ultimately, you have come to a true understanding of these truly remarkable people.

By now, however, you should be alerted to the fact that you are contemplating a highly unusual adventure and a challenging start to your teaching career.

I can leave you with no finer thoughts than those of Kathryn Polacca, a Navajo-Hopi from Crystal, New Mexico. In 1962, Kathryn wrote a series of guidelines for teaching the rural Navajo. It is still the most effective plan of action I have seen for dealing with those Navajo children who have not yet learned the white man's ways. Over the years, her advice has remained fresh, relevant, and highly effective. May you take her words of guidance and walk in beauty with her People:

1. Always be alert to the situation. Navajo words for "stupid" or "insane" express strong disapproval. Severe ridicule and teasing also indicate something is wrong. Sometimes things can be talked out. Other times, it is best to drop the matter. Perhaps time and understanding will work things out.

2. Navajo people need much patience, understanding, and help. They seek a life which has meaning for themselves and they struggle between two cultures in search of that meaning.

3. People who have difficulty in a second language often fear to express themselves in that language. Remember, when Navajo is spoken around you, the people are neither discussing you nor intending to be rude.

4. Almost everyone on the reservation is someone's relative. Avoid derogatory remarks. Being a stranger, your unkind remarks will not be understood or quickly forgotten. Hurt feelings run deep among the Navajo.

5. Indian people do not appreciate personal questions from a stranger. The Navajo will tell you about himself if and when he trusts you as a friend.

6. Be a good listener. Take time to listen. It is important. Clock-watchers tend to be insulting.

7. Avoid the use of "maybe". It is not easily understood by the Navajo. If you agree to do something "maybe" and then it does not happen, the Navajo regard it as just another broken promise. If you make a promise, keep it. No maybes.

8. Teasing is used by the Navajo as a means of control. Rules of conduct for the individual as well as the group are quickly learned, to avoid hard teasing.

9. Navajos appreciate your attempt to speak a few words in their language. It indicates to them that you sincerely would like to communicate.

10. Respect the things that others find helpful and sacred.

11. While many Navajos go on "Indian time," you are expected to be prompt and on time. You are on "white man's time" and you will be respected for being conscientious.

12. Favors are not expected to be returned person for person (You will rarely hear a "thank you"). However, if you are good to others, they will remember you in your time of need.

13. Sharing food at mealtime is extremely important to the Navajo. To refuse to share (or accept) food is strictly taboo.

14. Navajos appreciate laughter and fun. If you get them to relax and laugh, they just may begin to share part of their life with you. At that point, your students will want to learn from you.

Remember too, that your Navajo students will take time to evaluate you. They do not like to be pushed into liking you. Give them the time they need to develop a personal relationship they can be comfortable with.

Don't be surprised if your students act like students anywhere else in the United States either. Many Navajos have become acculturated and will have a set of needs different from those of their traditional friends.

What will you find for yourself if you do come to Navajoland? One teacher I surveyed said, "probably the most rewarding teaching experience possible." Another ended her survey form with this message for you: "The students need you! The regular classroom teachers will welcome you with outstretched arms! Please come!"

May you walk in beauty!

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